

## Overview: *Together We Learn, Together We Heal*

Across the country, millions of people suffer from the disease known as addiction. Fortunately, many people who once suffered from substance use disorders, as well as their families and friends, have seen their lives improve through treatment and recovery. Every September, **National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)** works to help more people benefit from a life-changing recovery process.

Sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, this year's campaign takes advantage of new developments to support people who suffer from substance use disorders and their families.

In this document, you will read about the current landscape of addiction, treatment, and recovery, as well as new resources available online to help people with substance use disorders and their families. The last section outlines what you can do to bring healing to your community.

### **Recovery Month: Helping to Advance the National Dialogue**

The addiction, treatment, and recovery landscape has changed drastically since the inception of **Recovery Month**. A detailed list of milestones can be found in the sidebar on page 3, and below are some larger-scale achievements over the past 20 years since **Recovery Month** began:

- Medication-assisted treatment options such as methadone are better understood today and are used more widely than in the past to help people heal.<sup>1</sup>
- People are recognizing that addiction is a disease and not a character flaw, though some myths still persist.<sup>2</sup>
- There are more resources available than ever – both in communities and online – to offer solace and treatment services to people with substance use disorders.
- Some people in recovery have become open about sharing their experiences with substance use disorders, treatment, and their own path of healing.<sup>3</sup>

Although these improvements offer people in need of treatment and recovery services more options, there is still more work to be done, and it continues with **Recovery Month** this September.

## Jared Hamre

September 13, 2008, marked my third year of recovery. I am grateful for this process. That doesn't mean life struggles have not come my way, but recovery has given me the tools to now cope with challenges.

It was residential treatment that started me on this life-learning process. With the help of the staff and residents, I've learned that practicing positive behavior changes has enabled me to become a good, dependable person – I've changed how I act and perceive myself.

About six months into my recovery I decided to start giving back by speaking at my former high school. Helping others, owning my history, and sharing the value of my experience have taken away the unnecessary shame of this disease. My drug addiction would have ruined my life, but in a matter of three years, recovery has brought me positive friendships, a house, a dog, and a loving girlfriend who is not ashamed of my past, but proud and interested in my recovery.

I'm saddened that too many of my friends have passed away from using drugs. I could be one of them and I'm so grateful to be alive and living in recovery. I do not take recovery for granted. Through **Massachusetts Organization for Addiction Recovery (MOAR)**, I'm learning how to be a voice, helping to ensure that residential treatment can expand to help even more people to live in recovery. Learning how to make positive changes in recovery has given me the skills to be an advocate for positive public policy changes. Joined with others in recovery, families, and friends, voices like mine are making a positive difference in the treatment and recovery landscape.

This year's **Recovery Month** theme is ***"Join the Voices for Recovery: Together We Learn, Together We Heal."*** It emphasizes the need to use all available resources, in our communities and on the Internet, to educate people about the disease and to help those with substance use disorders, and those close to them, to get help and recover. It also celebrates the power of community support and understanding. By opening a dialogue about the harmful effects of alcohol and drug addiction on families, friends, and communities, we can provide hope, healing, and better help those struggling with substance use disorders embark on a successful journey of long-term recovery.

## Where We Are Today

Each year, millions of people suffer from substance use disorders, and countless more are affected by someone else's problem. A substance use disorder is defined as a dependence on or abuse of alcohol and/or drugs, including prescription drugs.<sup>4</sup>

Specifically, in 2007, an estimated 23.2 million people aged 12 or older needed treatment for a substance use disorder in the United States.<sup>5</sup> Even though the rate of current illicit drug use among youths ages 12 to 17 has declined significantly from 2002 to 2007, it is startling to see how many young people start using substances at an early age.

# JOIN THE VOICES FOR RECOVERY

For example, in 2007:<sup>6</sup>

- 85.9 percent of people aged 12 or older who initiated alcohol use in the past year did so before they reached the legal age of 21. Of those people, the average age they began misusing alcohol was 15.8 years.<sup>7</sup>
- An estimated 2.7 million people aged 12 or older used an illicit drug for the first time within the past year; 60.1 percent were younger than 18 at the time.<sup>8</sup> Among people aged 12 to 49, the average age of first use was:
  - **Inhalants** – 17.1 years
  - **Marijuana** – 17.6 years
  - **Cocaine** – 20.2 years
  - **Ecstasy** – 20.2 years
  - **Nonmedical use of pain relievers** – 21.2 years<sup>9</sup>
- Many young Americans began their drug use by taking pain relievers nonmedically or using marijuana. In 2007:<sup>10</sup>
  - 2.1 million people had misused pain relievers for the first time within the past year, with an average age at first use of 21.2 years.
  - 2.1 million people had used marijuana for the first time within the past year (approximately 6,000 people per day). Most (62.2 percent) were younger than age 18 when they first used it.
  - Most people aged 12 and older who had used any illicit drug for the first time within the past year reported that their first drug was marijuana (56.2 percent). Nearly 31 percent started with the nonmedical use of prescription drugs.

## 20 Years of Progress

- 1986** The Office of Substance Abuse Prevention (OSAP) is created.
- 1989** The United States celebrates its first *Treatment Works! Month*, later to become *National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month*.
- 1990** The Americans with Disabilities Act passes and includes protections for people with mental health problems, including substance use disorders.
- 1992** President George H.W. Bush signs the Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration Reauthorization Act, creating the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).
- 2000** The Drug Addiction Treatment Act passes, allowing physicians to treat opioid addiction with certain narcotic medications.
- 2003** The New Freedom Commission on Mental Health is created and calls for the transformation of mental health care in the United States, including substance use disorders, to a focus on recovery.
- 2003** SAMHSA launches the *Access to Recovery (ATR)* grant program to increase access to treatment.
- 2005** The Center for Substance Abuse Treatment within SAMHSA hosts 100 stakeholders to discuss a renewed emphasis on recovery. The word “recovery” is given a formative definition for the first time.
- 2007** SAMHSA’s *Report to Congress on Co-Occurring Mental and Substance Use Disorders* identifies barriers to appropriate treatment and support services and proposes a system in which co-occurring disorders are addressed and treated as primary illnesses.
- 2008** The Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act passes in Congress to provide equal coverage of mental health and addiction compared with traditional medical coverage.

# JOIN THE VOICES FOR RECOVERY

A substance use disorder does not discriminate against its victims based on age, race, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or community. This disease controls people's lives and has devastating effects on their friends and families. Substance use disorders are one of the most deadly ailments, with **one in four deaths each year attributed to alcohol, tobacco, or illicit drug use**.<sup>11</sup> The following substances contribute to numerous negative health issues:

- **Heavy drinking** contributes to illnesses associated with each of the top three causes of death: heart disease, cancer, and stroke.
- **Cocaine** has been shown to contribute to deaths from heart attacks, respiratory failure, strokes, and seizures. In extremely rare occasions, sudden death can occur on the first use of cocaine.<sup>12</sup>
- **Heroin** is associated with fatal overdoses and infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis – particularly in people who inject the drug.<sup>13</sup>
- **Methamphetamine**, known to many as speed or meth, can cause psychotic behavior, hallucinations, and stroke when used over a long period of time.<sup>14</sup>

These tragedies concern all of us. All Americans, not just those directly affected by substance use disorders, must commit to helping people with the disease. Raise awareness in your community to help break down the myths associated with this powerful disease and encourage support and healing.

## Accepting the Problem Exists

Sadly, only a small number of people received the help they needed in 2007:<sup>15</sup>

- Of the 23.2 million people (9.4 percent of people aged 12 or older) who needed treatment for a substance use disorder, only 3.9 million people (1.6 percent of the population) received some kind of treatment for a problem related to alcohol or drug use in 2007. Specifically, an estimated 2.2 million people had received treatment at a self-help group within the last year.
- However, as many as 20.8 million people needed but did not receive treatment at a specialty facility in the past year.

**MYTH:** If you have an alcohol or drug problem, you are probably unemployed.

**FACT:** More than three-quarters of the estimated 17.4 million current illicit drug users aged 18 or older in 2007 (13.1 million people) were employed either full or part time.

**MYTH:** This problem only happens among less-educated people.

**FACT:** Among adults aged 18 or older, the rate of past-month alcohol use in 2007 increased with higher levels of education. Young adults aged 18 to 22 enrolled full time in college were more likely than part-time college students and people not currently enrolled in college to use alcohol in the past month, binge drink, and drink heavily.

**SOURCE:** *Results From the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings*, pp. 27, 34.

There are multiple barriers to receiving treatment, including:

- **Perceptions and consequences** – Many people do not get treatment because they are concerned about what their families, friends, community, or employers may think. During 2004 through 2007, 8.9 percent of people who made an effort to get treatment, but did not receive it at a specialty facility, were concerned that getting help might cause neighbors or their community to have negative opinions of them, and 7 percent thought it might have a negative consequence on their jobs.<sup>16</sup> Despite these perceptions, fewer than 20 percent of people in America actually would think less of a friend or relative who is in recovery from addiction.<sup>17</sup> Family and friends can break through these barriers by encouraging the person to access services and by supporting others in their community who have taken steps to get treatment.
- **Denial** – While it can be challenging to help people even if they have admitted they need treatment or recovery services, it can be even more difficult to help people who are in denial about their addiction. In 2007, an estimated 93.6 percent of people with substance use disorders who needed treatment did not receive it **because they felt they did not need it**.<sup>18</sup> With your help, this number could be lower in 2009. People's acceptance of their problem often motivates them to change their behaviors, which is a key factor in a successful recovery process.

In addition, the cost of treatment is sometimes a barrier, although recent changes have made insurance coverage for treatment and recovery services more accessible. The October 2008 passage of the **Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act**, which expanded the Mental Health Parity Act of 1996, provides equity in the coverage of mental health and substance use disorders compared with traditional medical coverage. It does so by ensuring that group health care plans do not charge higher co-payments, coinsurance, or deductibles than those used for other diseases, and do not impose out-of-pocket limits and lower day and visit limits.<sup>19</sup>

## Treatment is Effective and Recovery From the Disease is Attainable

The pain and suffering caused by a substance use disorder can resonate through entire families and communities – often over extended periods of time. Undergoing and fully committing to a process of treatment and recovery can help heal the damages – physical and emotional – caused by substance use disorders.

Fortunately, substance use disorders are treatable diseases from which a person can recover.<sup>20</sup> Recovery is not always easy, and it is a process that continues long after someone stops misusing alcohol and/or drugs.

**MYTH:** The only reason people with a substance use disorder do not get help is because they are not ready to stop using.

**FACT:** While some people do avoid treatment because they are in denial about their addiction, many make an effort to get help. During 2004 through 2007, many people did not receive specialty treatment because they:

- Had no health coverage and could not afford the cost of treatment (35.9 percent)
- Had no transportation and getting to treatment was inconvenient (10.5 percent)
- Did not know where to go for treatment (6.9 percent)

**SOURCE:** Results From the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings, p. 82.

With the chronic and recurring nature of substance use disorders, people might experience several cycles of relapse and intensive treatment over multiple years.<sup>21</sup> Although these setbacks may be discouraging, especially for their loved ones, remaining supportive despite the challenges that arise is critical for success. Treatment and recovery help people and their families restore and rebuild their lives.

## The Recovery Process Heals

A successful recovery journey hinges on an individualized, comprehensive, and integrated approach to the healing process. A variety of methods exist to help people in their process of recovery.<sup>22</sup> Some people recover on their own; others recover through treatment and/or the assistance of self-help, mutual-aid groups, or medication-assisted therapies. A holistic and recovery-oriented approach to overcome substance use disorders uses a range of age-, gender-, drug-, faith-, and culturally appropriate services to help people recover physically, mentally, and spiritually. By working with a person's physical, environmental, and spiritual background and any mental health issues surrounding a person's addiction to provide individualized care, we have an opportunity to improve a person's success in recovery.<sup>23</sup>

In particular, for some people, substance use might be a coping mechanism for other serious emotional and health issues. Addressing any underlying problem can repair the deeper problems associated with addiction. For example, in 2007, 22.1 percent of adults aged 18 or older with serious psychological distress also were dependent on or abused illicit drugs or alcohol.<sup>24</sup>

The recovery process should be specific to the person, and should involve families and friends, if possible. Elements may include:

- Receiving medical attention through detoxification and individual and/or group therapy in an inpatient treatment setting
- Focusing on improving overall health and redefining oneself
- Exploring spirituality through faith-based communities
- Changing social interactions and expanding social networks – particularly to include others in recovery and participate in mutual support groups
- Empowering oneself by helping others

A well-rounded recovery support network complements this process and is central for successful rehabilitation from addiction. Family, friends, employers, and other concerned community members must be supportive, as recovery and resilience involve a lifelong process of healing.<sup>25</sup>

## The Internet – A Recovery Resource

Much has changed since **Recovery Month** first began 20 years ago, including the advent of the Internet, which offers a unique opportunity to teach, foster knowledge, and provide support. The number of people turning to the Internet for information and connections to other people has skyrocketed over the last decade. According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, approximately 75 percent of adult Americans use the Internet. Most of these Internet users (75 percent) search for health information online.<sup>26, 27, 28</sup>

Specifically, people experiencing addiction, and their loved ones, can take steps toward recovery by visiting online message boards and forums. Online resources offer guidance for those thinking about getting help, those in recovery, and anyone trying to help a loved one into recovery. They provide a community for people to share their experiences, challenges, and questions about treatment and recovery. In addition to discussions between people in recovery, some online forums also feature recovery counselors or other providers who can offer help, support, and advice. A safe and non-threatening environment, such as one on the Web, can motivate people and help them find clarity in their situation.

Treatment services, too, have evolved with the online world. People can now find services online, which is helpful if they live in rural communities or in cities without access to public transportation, or if they are otherwise unable to access standard treatment services. Online services change how people receive help – instead of a once-a-week counseling session, for example, people can access support every day, which can help prevent relapses. People of all ethnic groups and age levels within the United States take advantage of the more than 70 different online recovery programs and services available.<sup>29</sup>

Research suggests that treatment satisfaction is the same whether treatment is provided via Internet-based counseling or through on-site group counseling. In fact, some people prefer Internet-based services because of convenience and increased confidentiality.<sup>30</sup>

Some online resources include:

- **SAMHSA's "Find Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment" Web site** – Lists resources about mental health, substance abuse, and treatment
- **SAMHSA's "Accessing Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Online" Webcast** – Examines how technology has revamped the field of substance use disorder prevention and addiction treatment
- **The Sober Recovery Community** – Offers support forums for people in recovery, as well as family and friends

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- **Sober.com** – Provides message boards for people in recovery and also provides recovery coaching from professional counselors
- **Cyber Recovery Fellowship** – Offers faith-based forums for people in recovery
- **eGetGoing** – Helps people new to recovery through online support groups led by certified counselors
- **The Sober Village** – Offers online community forums for people in recovery
- **Shouting Inside** – Helps young adults who misuse substances share their stories and their struggles with like-minded people.

Check the Web sites of local treatment facilities and mutual support groups in your area, as they may have their own, localized message boards to turn to for support. Another important resource is SAMHSA's National Helpline, at **1-800-662-HELP**, for toll-free information and treatment referrals in English and Spanish, 24 hours a day.

## ***Together We Learn, Together We Heal: What You Can Do***

Celebrate **Recovery Month** this September by teaching people with substance use disorders – as well as your broader community – about the disease, how it affects them, and opportunities for supporting others through treatment and recovery. Also, offer assistance to people you think may have a problem and are not yet in treatment, or help them understand and cope with addiction if it is in the family. Addiction is a health problem, so do your part to let those who suffer from it know that help exists. By supporting someone who is affected, you are making a positive change in the way substance use disorders, treatment, and recovery are perceived in your community.

For more information and organizations that can help provide treatment and other resources, visit the **Recovery Month Web site** at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>. Information on treatment options in your area and the special services available can be found at SAMHSA's "**Find Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment**" Web site, a portal that includes a searchable database of more than 11,000 U.S. treatment facilities and additional treatment resources. For additional **Recovery Month** materials, visit <http://www.recoverymonth.gov> or call 1-800-662-HELP.

Web sites or event examples mentioned in this document and on the **Recovery Month Web site** are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, or the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment.



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